



## Connecticut School Counselor Association

A Chartered Division of the American School Counselors Association

**Testimony of Virginia A. DeLong**  
**Government Relations & Advocacy Chairman**  
**Connecticut School Counselor Association**  
Education Committees  
Public Hearing - March 15, 2023

Representative Currey, Senator McCrory, Representative McCarty, Senator Berthel, and esteemed committee members my name is Virginia DeLong and I am a Director of School Counseling and Chairman of the Government Relations and Advocacy Committee for the CT School Counselor Association. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on several bills before you.

The Connecticut School Counselor Association represents over 1,400 school counselors across Connecticut who work with students from elementary school through adult education. School counselors provide support to students in three main domains - academic, career, and social emotional. There has been a great need for more school counselors in our state as not all of our students K-12 have access to a school counselor. Some of our districts most in need do not have the support needed for all students. Today I'd like to address a few bills that have been presented to the Education Committee.

**SB 1199: An Act Concerning Equity in Education** - while this bill seems to reference "educators", it seems to only focus on teacher recruitment and retention. We firmly believe that school counselors should be included in this language, as we too are educators in need of increasing not only the number of professionals in our field, but also increasing the diversity within our field as well. This is a strong goal of the CT School Counselor Association. We believe the best way to increase the diversity within our profession and increase our overall number of school counselors ready to work in our schools is by providing paid internships.

Currently, school counselors in training are participating in unpaid internships for 700 hours over 10 months. In many of our universities, students have left the program because they could not afford to work for free through their internships over the course of a school year. Financially this is very difficult for many school counseling students. Other states, including California, have recently dedicated money to offer school counseling students and other mental health professionals paid stipends as part of their program. We believe this could be very successful in Connecticut as well.

We also believe that the State's Aspiring Educators Diversity Scholarship Program should also include aspiring school counselors. Our children in CT should not only have teachers that look like them, but school counselors too. Our children are having very personal conversations with school counselors regarding their future as well as problems and issues they are facing every day. It is important that our students feel connected and comfortable with the adults they are talking to. While we certainly know that our school counselors are there to support all of our students, it would be most beneficial for students to have counselors that they can more closely identify with.

**SB 1197: An Act Concerning Workforce Development** - School counselors are some of the first "workforce developers" working with students to make sure they have developed a plan for their future and encouraging them in the area that they are most interested and passionate about. We are very much in support of making sure that all of our students always have access to the information that they need to make informed decisions about their future. While middle school counselors have been



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providing information on our agricultural science centers, technical schools and other programs to their students for decades, we also know that there are sometimes school officials who place barriers to students receiving this information. It would be helpful if this were mandated in our schools to ensure that students and their families received all the information they needed to make informed decisions.

We want our students to have various opportunities while in high school and therefore are in support of increasing dual credit enrollment programs within our schools. Creating a database, sharing agreements and expanding our course offerings for students throughout the state will be helpful in creating more equitable dual enrollment models within our schools.

In conclusion, as school counselors we want to support all of our students academically, socially and emotionally and with their future plans. We want all of our children to have access to a school counselor who they can connect with and feel supported by as they go through their K-12 education. **Please consider including school counselors specifically in SB 1199 by adding school counselors to the language of this bill.** This would be an important and monumental step towards increasing and diversifying our school counseling workforce. Senate bill 1199 and SB 1197 are so important to making sure our students are fully supported in their K-12 education. As always, if you'd like to discuss further I am happy to make myself available.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Virginia A. DeLong". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "V" and "D".

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